

NOTES ON THE USE OF DIFFERENT REGISTERS OF JUDEO-ARABIC BY ONE AUTHOR

by

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1. Professor S. D. Goitein's many-sided scholarly work culminated, no doubt, in the research of medieval Judeo-Arabic culture, especially concentrating upon documentary Geniza material. It seems therefore appropriate to honor the memory of this great scholar with a discussion of a facet of the linguistic culture of medieval Judeo-Arabic.

2. Basically, Judeo-Arabic authors attempted to use classical Arabic. Yet, because of their deficiency in the mastering of this language, neo-Arabic and pseudo-correct elements penetrated their writings, giving rise to infinitely varied mixtures of classical and neo-Arabic features. In informal writings, as a rule, lower registers, containing more neo-Arabic elements, were used. And sometimes the very same author utilized different registers.

Yet it stands to reason that, even when using lower registers, with fewer classical elements, purposely, Judeo-Arabic authors still intend to write in classical Arabic. The deliberate use of lower registers reflects the gap between the uniform character of classical Arabic in theory and its variability in practice. This facet, however, cannot be adequately treated but in the framework of a general study of the multi-layered character of Judeo-Arabic (Blau, forthcoming), and this is outside the scope of this paper.

3. We shall start with a petition to the caliph, also preserved in seven drafts (Gil, 1983, ii, pp. 347–55). If one adheres to a narrow definition of Judeo-Arabic, viz. that Judeo-Arabic is written by Jews *for Jews*, then this petition, addressing the caliph, is already outside the bounds of Judeo-Arabic proper. Nevertheless, the changes of style contained in the drafts and the final product are not without interest for our subject. The reason for these changes is, of course, quite clear: the necessity of addressing the caliph in a "grammatical" language.

In the third draft (written, as are all the drafts, in Hebrew characters) *wa-l-ʿabīd yaḡḡraʿū ʾilā llāh* 'and the servants implore God' occurs (Gil,

1983, ii, p. 353, l. 21), corrected in the petition (written in Arabic characters: Gil, 1983, ii, p. 355, l. 17) to *yaḍraʿūn*, in accordance with the rules of classical grammar. In one of the drafts vulgar *baqiyyū* 'they remained' is used, as against grammatical *baqū*, not only in the final petition, but also in two drafts (Gil, 1983, ii, p. 351, l. 18; p. 355, l. 14; p. 359, l. 21; p. 350, l. 10). In one of the drafts vulgar *ʿalā baʿḍhum baʿḍ* 'on each other' occurs, corrected not only in the final form but also in one of the drafts according to classical grammar, though in a different form (Gil, 1983, ii, p. 349, ll. 23–24; p. 355, ll. 14–15; p. 353, ll. 3–4).

4. One will not be surprised that the final form of literary works too is more grammatical than its draft. When writing the draft, the author is less concerned with its language. A case in point is Maimonides' *Mishna Commentary*. Since S. A. Hopkins will treat this subject (Hopkins, forthcoming), I shall content myself with citing from his material the fact that vulgar Maghrebine *nafʿalū* is totally absent from Maimonides' writings, yet it occurs in this draft. It is also interesting, in this context, to note that, in some rare cases, Maimonides changed a classical form, utilized by him in the draft, to a less classical one in the final version, when he employed (*Mishna Šabbath*, x. 3) *afwāh* in the draft and *afmām* in the final version, 'mouths' and (viii. 4) *li-š-šabāya* (with final *he* rather than final *aleph*) in the draft and *li-š-šabāyāt* in the final version, 'to the girls'. It is a moot question whether this fact reflects a deficient knowledge of classical Arabic or, rather, the gap between the general intention of using classical language in theory and a lack of care for details in practice.

In this context, I would also like to mention the fact that Maimonides, till his very last days, introduced not only corrections in matters of subject, but also linguistic changes into his handcopy of the *Mishna Commentary* (the bulk of which we still possess). Thus he utilized in the original version *šajara*, 'fruit', according to Spanish usage, only to change it later to classical *ṭamara* (e.g., *Baba Batra*, v. 4). In Spanish Arabic verbs *iii y* terminated in 3.ps. sg. perf. in *-āt*, rather than in *-at* as in classical Arabic (as well as in Egypt, where Maimonides later lived). Maimonides often used *-āt*-forms in the original version, to change it later to *-at* forms (as *ibid.* ix. 3), sometimes also giving rise to pseudo-correct forms (*Ketubbôt*, iii. 3, *raḍāt* 'she wanted', "corrected" to *raḍat*, the classical form being *raḍiyat*).

5. Sometimes the same author uses different registers dependent on the literary genre. Again Maimonides is a case in point. In his literary works (not only in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, but also in his *Mishna Commentary*), he employed a register we can best call "classical Arabic with neo-Arabic admixture"; in his *responsa*, however, he used a language

containing more neo-Arabic elements. Yet even then (cf. above par. 2), his general intention was to use classical language, as it can be inferred from the occurrence of pseudo-corrections (see Blau, 1957, p. 190, *fa-qad ta^caddā al-munkir ta^caddin* ^c*azīm* 'he who blamed [him], sinned grossly', where Maimonides used *ta^caddin* with *tanwīn kasra*, rather than with *tanwīn fatha*, as demanded by classical grammar).

6. One of the problems of modern standard Arabic is the rendering of dialogues. Since Arabs converse in vernacular, rather than in standard Arabic, it is artificial to use high registers in dialogues, and different devices are employed by modern authors, from the use of low registers to vernacular language. Even medieval authors faced this problem. My late teacher, Professor D. H. Baneth, Professor Goitein's relative, colleague and close friend, in his lectures called attention to the fact that Abū-l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (10th century) uses in the dialogues of his *Kitāb al-Aghānī* a lower register than usual (see e.g., Abū-l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, 1932, pp. 2, l. 6, *‘alā šarīṭat(i) tuqīmānī* 'on the condition that you remain', exhibiting an asyndetic prepositional clause, quite exceptional in classical Arabic, and further the use of *ayy šay^ṣ* 'what' instead of *mā* (p. 5, ll. 4, 5) and the use of personal pronouns preceding finite forms of the verb, without any emphasis (p. 7, l. 7).

Interestingly enough, Saadya Gaon (9th century) also employs a lower register in a dialogue. Thus (Zucker, 1984, pp. 7–8) he deals with problems of *kalām* in a rather formal, though post-classical style. Yet when citing an imaginary dialogue, he lowers his register: (*ibid.*, p. 8, ll. 6, 7) *tanāwal min ḥabb al-istimāxīqōn (!) ʔarjū ʔan tu^cāfā kamā ʔāf* (read *ʔāfā*, for *ʔūfiyaʔ*) *fulān* 'take from the purgative, I hope you will be cured as N.N. [was cured]'

7. As we have seen, Judeo-Arabic authors were deficient in the mastery of classical Arabic. Nevertheless, their command of the classical language enabled them to use different registers. It stands to reason that even when employing low registers they intended to use classical Arabic, as it can be inferred from the occurrence of pseudo-corrections. The deliberate use of lower registers reflects, it seems, the gap between the uniform character of classical Arabic in theory and its variability in practice.

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